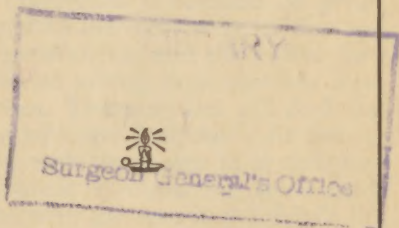


INSTRUCTING YOUR CHILD *in the* FACTS OF SEX

A PAMPHLET
FOR PARENTS



Health Education Bulletin No. 126

OHIO STATE DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH

* * *

COLUMBUS

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Instructing Your Child in the Facts of Sex

THIS pamphlet is addressed to Ohio parents who wish their children to grow up clean of mind and body. It urges them to consider the desirability of instructing their children in the facts of sex and reproduction as a means of guarding against the evils of improper training which practically every child sooner or later receives from unclean sources. Taking a more extended view, it urges them to consider the greatest menace to the well-being of this and coming generations, and the course they can follow to protect their children from this menace. The pamphlet will deal successively with the desirability of sex instruction, with the means to be followed by the parent in imparting sex knowledge, and with the ages in the child's life at which the various stages of such instruction should come. In other words it will deal with the "*Why?*" the "*How?*" and the "*When?*" of the question.

WHY?

NO one wishes to break down the illusions of childhood and bring a boy or girl face to face, sooner than is necessary, with the bald facts of life. The silence of parents on subjects

of sex, however, does not mean that children remain in ignorance on such matters. Most children, as investigation and observation indicate, get their first sex knowledge from improper sources and at an earlier age than most parents wish to believe.

Nine children out of ten are going to be thrown at one time or another into surroundings where sex facts will be discussed in an unclean way. The great truths of reproduction will be distorted into lewdness and obscenity, if a child is not prepared in advance with a knowledge of the true cleanness of the subject and its great physiological and biological principles.

Look back upon your own experience as a child. Where did you get your first knowledge of

WHAT WAS YOUR sex and repro-
EXPERIENCE duction? What effect did the

source of your first knowledge have upon the attitude which you adopted toward such matters and toward persons of the opposite sex? Upon the basis of your own experience, do you prefer to have your child taught—rather than mistaught—by foul-minded playmates, by obscene pictures, by lewd, ignorant servants or hired men, or do you prefer to tell him yourself, tactfully and cleanly, building up his knowledge gradually and bringing

the reproductive function into proper perspective as one of the most wonderful of human endowments?

Undesirable as every thoughtful parent will admit the acquisition of knowledge from wrongful sources to be, some parents may feel that the consequences to the child are not likely to be such as to justify the statement, made at the beginning of this discussion, that lack of proper instruction may expose the child to grave menaces to health and morals. Let us carry the consideration on beyond childhood and see if this is true. Take the case of a typical boy—possibly your son, possibly any other parent's son.

The boy's natural curiosity leads him from the earliest period of his life to ask

UNSATISFIED questions about the
CURIOSITY coming of babies in
his own and other
families. His par-

ents meet his questions with evasions, which further stimulate his curiosity, or with direct misstatements which, though they may satisfy his curiosity for the time, appear inadequate as he grows older. Searching farther afield to appease his unsatisfied curiosity, he comes into contact, when from nine to twelve years old, with his first outside information, in which facts are coupled with many unclean conceptions and smutty stories. With confidential relations be-

tween him and his parents discouraged by their earlier attitude, and with his new knowledge bearing all the attractions of forbidden fruit, the boy continues to build up a fund of distorted obscenity which satisfies his originally wholesome curiosity as to the great truths of race perpetuation.

As he grows older, the conventional reticence among older people in regard to sex matters drives the boy to those who freely discuss such matters and who are least likely to give him proper information. Natural physical changes which come at the age of fourteen or fifteen, unforeshadowed by advice from his parents, worry and puzzle him. Though his mind might be set at rest by a word or two from an authoritative source, the word he so much needs is often not spoken.

From the advertising of quack doctors and from his associates he gets the idea that the ordinary
DANGERS OF phenomena of a
IGNORANCE young man's life are signs of weakness and indicative of a need for sex activity. The only recognition he meets of the existence of venereal diseases is in the jokes and allusions of slightly older and "wiser" companions, emphasizing the attractiveness and minimizing the dangers of debauchery. Never in all his

life has he received any training either to show the need for self-control at this critical period or to develop such self-control. And self-control is the all-important factor in the situation!

When such a young man encounters temptation, as he inevitably will, he is apt, because of his lack of knowledge of the real significance of the temptation and what it involves, to yield, when if he had been forewarned he might easily have stood fast.

Too often, as every physician knows, even the first misstep is followed by infection with a venereal disease. Here again, without accurate information as to the seriousness of the disease, anxious to avoid being found out, the boy often attempts to treat himself or falls into the hands of a quack or charlatan who professes great skill in the treatment of "private diseases." The result is frequently the development of a chronic affection which blights his own life and may endanger the health or even lives of those nearest and dearest to him.

There is no intention to assert that this is an invariable succession of events in the life of every
IT MIGHT BE untaught boy. Despite
YOUR SON their handicaps, some
such boys may escape
unhurt, except by impure thoughts. The

course outlined, however, is so easily possible and so often true that no parent can disregard it. Every step indicated has a basis in fact.

IT IS A FACT that the boy whose first sex instruction comes from unclean sources shuns the subject in the presence of his parents.

IT IS A FACT that wrong instruction builds up an unwholesome attitude toward sex matters.

IT IS A FACT that improper teaching becomes increasingly more available as the boy grows older.

IT IS A FACT that quack doctors prey upon youthful ignorance and have frightened many a boy to his downfall.

IT IS A FACT that self-control and knowledge of danger are the boy's chief protection, but that many boys never learn this until too late.

IT IS A FACT that the consequences of such a course as outlined, in which ignorance or misinformation are the prime factors, may be as serious as those of the most thorough-going, deliberate career of dissipation.

The "*Why?*" of the sex instruction problem has thus far been discussed largely with respect to boys. In the case of girls the situation is different in detail but not in principle.

The little girl, all evidence indicates, is just as likely as the little boy to be contaminated

YOUR DAUGHTER by sources
NEEDS PROTECTION of impure sex knowl-

edge. Most parents would no doubt be horrified to learn in detail the conditions which their little daughters must face. Only the building up of a proper attitude in advance, through parental instruction, can enable the girl to meet these conditions without injury—either mental or physical.

Even in the case of the older girl, when development into womanhood brings increased need for confidential relations between mother and daughter, there is too often a singular lack of real confidence. As a result the girl turns to someone other than the mother for the help she needs and desires. The woman physician frequently has a young girl sent to her office bearing a note with a request "to tell Mary what she ought to know." The mother knows that some information is necessary but does not know how to impart it. This is a real tragedy; it represents an injustice to the daughter and finally closes the door to any development of that type of confidence between mother and daughter which is the mother's highest privilege. No mother ought to permit this great

office of hers to be usurped. The right kind of physician never wishes to take the mother's place; no matter how high the girl's confidence in the doctor—and it is often very high,—there is always a feeling of regret that the mother has missed so much.

Knowledge alone will, of course, protect neither boy nor girl. The possession of reason-

IMPORTANCE OF a b l y complete
SELF-CONTROL a n d accurate
knowledge o f

sex matters, however, and of a right conception of the importance of the question, will do much to build up in the mind of the boy or girl a proper attitude, which will later develop into that self-control in the face of temptation which is at the basis of right conduct. If nothing else is achieved by sex instruction, the stripping from the subject of the attractiveness of forbidden knowledge which leads so many on in the quest for sex information and the placing of the subject on the basis of other common sense and familiar facts, about which information may be asked from one's parents, will be well worth the effort used.

The mere telling of physiological facts is not the complete fulfillment of the parent's duty toward the child. A physician, as has been suggested, could probably do that better than the average par-

ent, but the physician would lack the thorough knowledge of the child and the confidential relation with him which enable the parent tactfully to present the subject in a character-building as well as an informative way. With this phase of the problem we are introduced to the question of just how to tell the child.

HOW?*

THE wholesome curiosity regarding matters of birth and sex, implanted by nature in every child, is likely to make its first appearance at the age of five, six or seven, in such questions as "Where did the baby come from?" or "Where did the kittens come from?" An evasion on the part of the parent, even though it be harmless at the time, is sure to be recognized by the child later, and will cause him to seek further information elsewhere. A willingness to meet his inquiries logically, or sometimes even to suggest that the answer to an exceedingly difficult question be postponed (provided this is absolutely satisfactory to the child), will preserve a feeling of confidence between child and parent, to serve as a sure foundation for further discussions.

The parent should prepare in advance to meet situations which childish curios-

*The following paragraphs are partly adapted from Pamphlet No. 3 of the Oregon Social Hygiene Society.

ity will bring about, and not trust to inspiration of the moment for suitable answers. No phase of human relations demands more tact than does the unfolding of the veil which surrounds the ever-recurring mystery of creation.

Suppose the first question is, as suggested, "Where did the baby come from?" If the child

ANSWERING is very little, some ex-
QUESTIONS planation of the family group—mother

and father and child—as related to birds, for instance, may be used in answer to the question. "Just as the mother bird prepares a warm nest," the child may be told, "and protects the tiny eggs with the warmth of her body, so the mother has inside her body a warm, soft place where the baby may grow and be nourished until it is old enough to be born and take care of its own nourishment."

With an older child, it is better to drop all such terms as "nest" and to take up a frank discussion of the fact that there is a special organ in the mother's body where the child grows and is nourished through the mother's blood stream, by the food which she eats, until at the end of several months changes begin which result in the disattachment of the child and its expulsion from the mother's body. It is especially desirable at this time to make the child feel a sense of re-

sponsibility and care for the mother during this period. In little boys, especially, the response is very frank and often the parental instinct will at once show itself in a spirit of real chivalry toward the mother, which tends to strengthen the bond between them materially.

Again, the question may bring up the relation of father to offspring, as when the child inquires: "What does it mean to say a dog is half shepherd and half St. Bernard?" Often the little child's dawning curiosity will be satisfied by such a simple answer as this: "The expression means that one of the dog's parents was a St. Bernard and the other a shepherd dog. All little dogs have both a father and a mother; little kittens always have a father and a mother, and so too there are always father and mother birds when little birds are born and there are always fathers and mothers when little children are born."

If it seems necessary or desirable to go further the explanation can be aided

FLOWERS AS AN EXAMPLE

by showing the child a flower and explaining the process of fertilization—how a bee, or the wind, carries pollen from flower to flower; how this pollen, carrying male cells, goes down through the pistil of the flower into the ovary, where the female cells are pro-

duced; how the male and female cells unite and grow into seeds, which in turn produce new plants and allow the process of reproduction to continue. "Just as in the flower, so in all animals and in people," the parent may add, "there are both male and female—father and mother—cells, and both father and mother have parts in developing their babies."

If the child's question is too unexpected or difficult for an immediate answer, ask him to wait twenty-four hours. *Then answer as frankly and as truthfully as possible.* This gives time for thought and yet steers the parent away from the difficulty which almost always results from a request to "wait till you are older." This latter answer seldom satisfies the child. Thus put off by the parent, he is likely to go straight to work to find out an answer, searching for it in undesirable places and often in a group of children.

The point of chief importance for the parent to remember is to *keep the line of*

KEEP THE CHILD'S *communications open*
CONFIDENCE *by the exchange of*

frankness for confidence. Almost any question a child may ask can safely be answered by the use of the simplest language. If the child is old enough to ask an intelligent question, he should be an-

swered frankly. Any dodging by the parent may result in the loss of the child's confidence.

Sometimes the child may ask no questions at all about sex and reproduction. In view of the natural human curiosity in these matters, such silence may in general be taken to indicate that the child has received some inkling of the facts from other sources or has in some way got the idea that sex is a subject to be shunned. In this situation, the parent should make his own opening by referring to the birth of some baby or pet animal, thereafter continuing along the lines mapped out.

Where a child has been deceived as to the facts of birth, the parent can remedy the situation, if he begins soon enough, by comparing the previous misinformation to the Santa Claus myth—a harmless deception to be practiced on little children—and then proceed as before.

Many parents would not hesitate at the first steps in sex instruction if it were not for fear that the child's curiosity, thus stimulated, might demand too much knowledge. Experience in other relations with children, however, should show parents that it is not necessary to tell a little child much to satisfy his demand for knowledge. So long as his natural curiosity is satisfied and, above all, he is kept feeling that he may at any

time come to the parent with questions, his queries need not be expected to become so difficult to handle.

While instructing the child in the facts, the parent should at the same time make

CLEANNESSE him feel the sacredness of phenomena of birth
AND MODESTY and recognize

that the subject, like some others, should not be promiscuously discussed, even though it is perfectly proper to be talked about in the confidential relation between father or mother and child. It is also advisable to suggest to him that he should not discuss these matters with older children, on account of the skill and experience required to make the matter plain. This whole matter of reticence is important and needs emphasis, for some children, as soon as they are told an interesting thing, wish to impart it to someone else. With his first impressions of sex knowledge those of cleanness and modesty, the child will tend to continue looking at sex questions from a clean and modest viewpoint. The parent should endeavor to protect him from contrary influences.

In considering a program of sex instruction for children, the parent should remember that even the beginnings here outlined cover a wide period of time. There is no abrupt plunging of the in-

nocent child into a sea of biological facts. There is rather such a gradual building up of knowledge, linked naturally with the child's everyday life, that he will not consider sex knowledge as an attractively mysterious field, but will grow up clean and well-balanced in thoughts and acts.

What has thus far been described in the process of sex instruction is the lay-

INSTRUCTING THE OLDER CHILD ing of the foundations for later and more

detailed teaching. As the child grows older, it will desire to know the father's part in reproduction more fully. It should then be told simply but *plainly* of the organs of reproduction in both man and woman and of their functions. Otherwise it means but little to the boy or girl to be told that he or she is passing out of childhood into adult conditions. The child frequently fails to bridge the chasm between the establishment of puberty or adolescence and the capacity for reproduction. It is important to make this clear to the girl especially, and to draw her attention to the fact that it has taken twelve to fourteen years to develop her reproductive system to the point of functioning but that not for at least five or six years more does it develop to the point at which this

function should become active.

Think of the reverence for fatherhood and motherhood which will be inspired in the boy or girl mind by the presentation of calm, simple information in a clean, frank manner! Then think, in comparison, of the harsh awakening and perverted viewpoint which come when sex knowledge is imparted by another child or by an adult of unclean mind in the environment of a stable or an alley!

This later extension of sex instruction should by all means come at such a time and be of such a nature as to prepare the child for the changes which

DON'T DELAY TEACHING

he will experience with the attainment of puberty. Few girls, as remarked before, are properly prepared for the establishment of the menstrual function. They are given some hints, which fail to make them understand, and they constantly get a first impression that there is something peculiar or unnatural or repulsive about the period, with which they wish they did not have to come into contact. Boys probably have even less preparation than girls, as a rule, for the experiences of adolescence. How many boys are frightened and worried by their first seminal emissions, and in their ignorance are deterred by a false feeling of shame from asking questions which

would bring to them the information that such occurrences are quite natural! The fact that the change in the boy's life is less sweeping than that in the girl's should not lead parents to underestimate the importance which the change has to the boy.

Such a course of training from early childhood as has been outlined will have built up in the adolescent a mental attitude toward sex matters which will be, for either boy or girl, the surest protection against the contamination which will threaten as his or her circle of associations widens. In addition, however, there should come at the proper time some definite knowledge of venereal diseases—the amount and kind of information to be regulated to suit the individual. Girls who are exposed to questionable companions should be warned against possible unscrupulous suggestions and given such knowledge of venereal diseases as seems desirable. The duty of the boy toward girl associates, to keep them as safe from harm as he expects other boys to keep his own sister, should be emphasized.

The solution of the difficult problems growing out of association between adolescent boys and girls will be aided by teaching each sex the other's problem.

ing the boy the girl's problem and the girl the boy's problem. Each should be made to understand that both sexes go through practically the same unstable period, but that the boy has even stronger reactions than the girl in sexual matters; that it is only normal and physiological, and that if both would realize the physiological reason for it all and the tremendous changes which are going on, they would understand their unsettled condition and their vivid impulses. If there were a frank understanding on the part of the boy that when a girl declines to go into violent sports and activities it is his duty to accept conditions without argument, it would obviate many a trying situation and would avoid many real troubles brought about by the girl's overdoing and taking unnecessary risks because of a hesitancy to argue with the boy or young man.

All this later training which we have been considering—most important of all from the standpoint of physical health and equally important with the early training from the moral viewpoint—will progress easily if the proper foundations have been laid in childhood. The respect of the budding young man or woman for later training may, however, be gained only with difficulty if confidential relations between parent and child have not been built up earlier in life.

WHEN?

THE time to begin sex instruction is the minute your child asks his first question, regardless of his age. Postponement may mean the nullification of your efforts by destroying the feeling of complete confidence which is the prerequisite to effective teaching. Too many parents, unfortunately, while seeing the need for forging during their child's early years the weapon of self-control and placing it in his hand as he enters into the stern battle of adolescence, have delayed their beginning until too late. Such delay is usually due to a parent's placing too low an estimate on the seriousness of even the very little child's situation.

Statements collected from 637 college men in 1915, showed that 93 per cent of this group received their first sex impressions before the age of fourteen, and 72 per cent before the age of twelve. The ages at which first impressions were gained ranged, in the whole group, from four to fifteen. The largest group included those whose first knowledge came at ten or eleven years.

Information from 771 men regarding the age of proper sex instruction showed that this age had varied from six to twenty-five years, but that scarcely any of the 771 had been properly instructed

before the age of twelve. In most cases such instruction first came after the fourteenth year.

In short, three-fourths of this representative body of men had been improperly introduced to sex facts before the

**MOST INSTRUCTION
GIVEN TOO LATE**

age of twelve, but hardly any had received proper instruction before that time. Practically all had been acquainted with the subject before the fourteenth year, but only a few had been legitimately instructed before that time.

This investigation clearly establishes that most parents postpone too long such instruction as they give and that its effects are lessened by the earlier upbuilding of an unclean attitude toward matters of sex. The parent does not like to think that the child whom he considers a mere baby is exposed to immorality and uncleanness. Such, however, is unfortunately the case—even where the child and his associates are apparently products of the most refined environments.

This being true, the parent who guards his child most carefully will inspire through careful training and confidential relations a mental attitude which will help to protect it from contamination.

Remember that self-control, founded

upon accurate knowledge and a sane attitude, is the

TRAINING INSURES all - important
SELF CONTROL need of

the adoles-

cent. Self-control, we all know, cannot be gained in a short time but is the result of long training. Why should a child, never made to observe regular habits of eating or sleeping, untrained in early habits of cleanliness—in short, never trained to control his habits or desires,—be able immediately to control himself the moment he comes into contact with the enormously powerful impulses of the adolescent period, and resist any temptation which may come? Yet that is what we too often demand of him. Such a procedure is absolutely irrational. Only by careful training and discipline, introduced early and continued throughout childhood and early adolescence, can the boy or girl be helped to build up sufficient control to insure self-protection.

Begin sex instruction with your child at such an age that when first he hears from an unclean source perverted statements of sex functions, he will not hesitate to come to you for advice.

Don't think you are protecting your child from disagreeable facts when in reality you are leaving unguarded the way for the poisoning of his mind—

later perhaps for the poisoning of his body also.

Help your child to develop the self-control which he must have to win his fight against the temptations of adolescence.

This pamphlet is one of a series of sex hygiene publications issued by the Ohio State Department of Health. It is designed to aid parents in instructing young children. Children above the age of thirteen or fourteen should be provided with literature for their own reading, and pamphlets for this purpose are issued by the Department. Any of the following publications will be sent free upon request:

Health Education Bulletin No. 124—Some Things a Young Man Should Know About Sex and Sex Diseases. (For young men and boys over seventeen or eighteen.)

H. E. B. 125—How Any Boy Can Keep Fit. (For boys over thirteen or fourteen.)

H. E. B. 127—Some Things a Girl Should Know About Her Health. (For young women and girls over fourteen or fifteen.)

H. E. B. 129—The Problem of Sex Education in Schools. (Advice for educators.)

H. E. B. 131—The Ravage of the Innocents. (An outline of the methods by which the insidious attack of venereal diseases is being met.)

The parent will do well to equip himself for the responsibility of sex instruction by obtaining books on the subject. The State Department of Health will gladly suggest such books and will give confidential replies to individual questions on any phase of sex hygiene. Address:

**ADVISOR, CARE STATE DE-
PARTMENT OF HEALTH**
Columbus, Ohio.